



MARK FISHER 2023-02-09

## NO FUTURE 2012

NECROPOLITICS APOCALYPSE, BAUDRILLARD, DERRIDA, END OF THE WORLD#,  
HAUNTOLOGY, NO FUTURE

There was no future, but it wasn't like anyone expected.

2003. We're wandering through the industrial spectres and overgrown dereliction of the Lea Valley.

It's like the world has ended.

A world has ended here, in fact. But now nonhuman worlds teem and thrive amid the deserted

factories and the waste-strata. Feral plants, algae so thick and artificial-looking you'd swear you could walk across the canal on it.

It is not a space that humans live in any more. But it is a space they explore. Most of us there that day had alternative names. K-space names. Nick K, Woebot, Heronbone.

Heronbone shows us a social history in the form of discarded packaging from defunct commodities. They call Heronbone the bard of Stratford – this is his patch, his Waste Land, and many of his words are assembled from discards, fragments of Grime lyrics recalled from the pirates, observations of insect colonies, flights of fancy prompted by this desolated space. Nick K is ablaze with projects and schemes, his photographer's eye captured by images every few minutes. Photography is a darker art than most people routinely suspect. The visionary photographer can find the image, but they cannot necessarily see everything that is recessed in it.

Most photographs act as mirrors, reflecting back the past into a frozen present. But some make contact with more mysterious dimensions of time. The "traces and clues of things to come". Futures bleeding back. Omens that can only be read retrospectively.

Sometimes there are signs but no-one who can read them.

2007. Other stalkers are moving through the scurf space we had traversed four years before. Repetition, with a difference.

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### **Nothing again Nothing**

The 'mocked-up futuramas of the park' surrender East London to the eventless horizon of the End of History, in which nothing happens forever.

Nothing happens, again and again.

Nothing happens. And every time it does, it's announced with a press release.

In between our many visits to the Lea Valley in 2003 and Iain Sinclair and Robert Macfarlane's expedition there in 2007, what happened, of course, was the awarding of the Olympic games to London. In that period, Nick K died, the photograph he took that day in 2003 now looking more than ever like an eerie pre-echo both of his own fate, and the fate of the whole area, which has now been consumed by the CGI-shadow of 2012.

The first signs of a coming non-event is always the CGI.

### **Ghost marketing**

The CGI simulations that ring fence the Lea Valley project forward fake futures which will never arrive but which are immediately effective, already re-organising space in East London, already diverting resources from public to private. What this constitutes is a kind of negative hauntology, operating according to the familiar hype-dynamics of corporate capital. (Cybercapital relies on its own ethereal entities, of course.) We are not dealing with the spectres of lost possibilities, the

ghosts of things that never happened, or the traces of forgotten events photoshopped out of the end of history. Instead, we are confronting the CGI-signs of a massive pseudo-event. A pre-scripted PR initiative disguised as an authentic happening.

According to some interpreters, 2012 is the year of the Mayan apocalypse. (Don't worry, though, it's scheduled for December, so it shouldn't disrupt the Olympics.) The Olympics are now correlated with the end of time in quite a different way.

The arrival of the Olympics in China is not just a ratification of the Chinese regime, it's also another moment in the end of History. 2008 is a symbolic threshold, much like 1989. Anti-modernist protests against China obscure the fact that the Olympics, like the People's Republic Of China, is now inherently meshed with Global capital. 2008 will celebrate this integration, which may well presage a new mode of capitalism, in which authoritarian State control co-exists with PKD-like piratical capital. Victorian vampirism reformatted for cyberspace. The spectre of ultrapostmodernism, in which everything can be mass-replicated, but nothing new will ever be invented.

### **Memory Disorders**

Both in Derrida's original articulation of the concept, and its current recirculation, 15 years after *Specters Of Marx*, hauntology must be understood in relation to postmodernity. Postmodernism, in turn, has to be understood – as Jameson has taught us – as 'the logic of late capitalism'. Postmodern temporality is captured by Fukuyama's claim – everywhere officially disavowed, even by Fukuyama itself, even as, surreptitiously, it is universally accepted, operating as a kind of presupposition of the contemporary cultural unconscious – that we have reached the 'end of History'. This is not only the conclusion of the process, but also the final cause to which everything has always been tending. End, then, in a double, appropriately Hegelian, sense: the terminus and the teleological goal.

The logic of late capitalism awaits the disintegration of the old Soviet bloc to find its fullest expression. Jameson's great contribution was to have grasped the way in which, far from leading to an efflorescence of cultural innovation, the unprecedented dominion of capitalism over the globe and the unconscious would lead only to cultural situation given over to previously inconceivable levels of stagnation and inertia. Shorn of the confidence that an elite modernism could provide a revolutionary alternative to pacifying entertainment, no longer capable of believing that there was any form of detournement which could not in turn be re-incorporated and commodified, Jameson is the successor to both the Frankfurt School and the Situationists.

Jameson's Marxism, in other words, had taken cognizance of Baudrillard's critique. It was Baudrillard who anticipated the fusion of the opinion poll and reality TV in the seamless system of cultural 'interactivity' which disarms any oppositional impulse by not only interpellating the consumer, but inducting them into its circuits. You decide. Text your response. Vote online. Join the debate. More or bore.

Jameson and Baudrillard understood that this user-generated content, together with the

concomitant retreat of the cultural elite that has enabled it, would not lead to new kinds of creativity, but to pastiche and retrospection. Just as the capitalist language of 'diversity' is a cover for new modes of homogeneity. The duplicity that operates here is more a strange structural effect than any deliberate attempt at mystification, Jameson observes.

What Jameson calls the 'nostalgia mode' is one expression of this homogeneity. This remains one of Jameson's most ingenious formulations – the nostalgia in question is not manifested in a psychological state but in a kind of unacknowledged formal reiteration.

Hauntology is the counterpart to this nostalgia mode. The preoccupation with the past in hauntological music could easily be construed as 'nostalgic'. But it is the very foregrounding of temporality that makes hauntology differ from the typical products of the nostalgia mode, which bracket out history altogether in order to present themselves as new. Post postpunk, Indie's equivalent of mock tudor.

The great sonic-theoretical contribution of *The Caretaker* to the discourse of hauntology was his understanding that the nostalgia mode has to do not with memories but with a memory disorder. The Caretaker's early releases seemed to be about the honeyed appeal of a lost past: Al Bowlly's aching croon in the Strand ballroom in prewar tearoom London, buried beneath the sound which constitutes something like the audio-correlate of hauntology itself: crackle. In veiling the past, crackle also makes the dimension of time audible. It is through this scratching of the scanner-lens that we can hear the time-wound, the chronological fracture, the expression of the sense, crucial to hauntology, that 'time is out of joint'. Dyschronia.

As *The Caretaker* project has developed, though, it has become more about amnesia than memory. Theoretically pure anterograde amnesia is not about the inability to remember, so much as the incapacity to make new memories. The inability to distinguish the present from the past. The cultural pathology of a clipshow culture locked into endless rewind.

It as if *The Caretaker* has taken us from an Overlook hotel/ Dennis Potter themepark into a simulation of neurological disorder. Fragments of tunes providing minimal orientation in an labyrinth of abstract sound. Have you heard this before? You can never be sure.

### **Nostalgia For Modernism**

But if there is one act which makes a case for the supreme pertinence of the concept of hauntology in relation to music today, it is Burial. Precisely because Burial deals with nostalgic longings, his music does not belong to the nostalgia mode. What you hear in Burial's two LPs is a craving for a past which nevertheless appears irretrievably lost, veiled behind a relentless drizzle of crackle. Beyond the longing for a particular moment or a particular musical genre is a longing for the ceaseless forward motion of a culture which once appeared capable of infinite renewal, but which is now used up, involuted. The nostalgia for modernism resists the postmodern nostalgia mode.

Burial's music is possessed by an extraordinary sense of space. This isn't only a question of the production, which recalls Martin Hannett as much as King Tubby or Basic Channel. It is also

about what the images the music evokes – very vivid audio-vignettes of South London this decade. Edward Hopper sound paintings of London after the rave. A city populated by ex-ravers gone to seed, like Nigel Cooke's dejected vegetables. The long comedown after all the highs. Serotonin crash and anti-depressants. The spaces that are the correlates of such disaffected states. All day cafes and night buses glowing like diving bells in the undersea murk of the early hours. What haunts here is not only the past but possible futures. A drowned world catastrophe leaking back in time.

Haunting is about space as much as time – about the spaces where the time rift becomes perceptible, and, with Burial's debut LP in particular, it was as if you were hearing double: hearing both the current dereliction and the former collective ecstasy. Flashbacks flaring in the gloom. What you are attuned to is a specific sense of place, as opposed to the 'third place' – the space that is neither home nor work, but which combines elements of both. Spaces of consumer convalescence which could be anywhere. Burial's 'In McDonald's' relocates the spatially-indifferent multinational capsule of the corporate franchise in a specific city: London, once again the capital of Capital. Once the sooty, smoggy centre of industrial capital, now the main hub of cybercapital. Open for business. Closed to almost anything else.

### **Is this burning an eternal flame?**

The arrival of the Olympic flame in London a few weeks ago was a pseudo-event on the grandest of scales, given content only by its subversion.

The CGI shadows of 2012 already enclose us. Present time captured into the performance of pre-scripted PR opportunities forever.

But 2012 is an opportunity for dissent too. A focus for disaffection. Burial's second LP includes a sample from Lynch's INLAND EMPIRE.

'I saw your light, it burns forever.'

You could hear this as the secret key to Burial's whole sensibility. Like Lynch, Burial is attuned to the muffled, muted light – flashes of the numinous – that can be fleetingly glimpsed through the mundane. Distant lights, or lights that can be apprehended only from a distance.

Can we be guided by these lights, instead of by the Olympic flame, a symbol of a capital now more globalised than ever ever, the ultra bright strip lights drawing planetary destiny into an eternal shopping mall surrounded by a sweatshop?

taken from here

Footo: Bernhard Weber

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